



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS TO BENEFIT ALL

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Video Transcript

[Text: Young African Leaders Initiative - Online Training Series]

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My name is Jennifer Thomas and this is *Protecting Human Rights to Benefit All*.

In this lesson, we will examine how we identify marginalized groups. We will look at the unequal burden placed on them. We will talk about the difference between equality versus equity and why that difference matters for marginalized groups. Finally, we will explore the ways that culture, economics, and religion are sometimes used to violate the rights of individuals.

Those in the majority or positions of power are charged with ensuring that people can equally access opportunities, goods and services. Those denied equal access are commonly referred to as being marginalized - socially disadvantaged and relegated to the fringes of society.

People all over the world are often marginalized based upon race, color, sexuality, gender, disability, economic or social status. People who are marginalized may not have fair access to education, jobs, housing, or health care, and violence is sometimes directed at marginalized individuals. To ensure that all people in a particular country have access to equal opportunities, governments often elevate marginalized groups through affirmative action, or other special protections.

Equal protection requires active efforts to ensure that members of all groups enjoy equal rights. Equal protection allows for celebration of diversity and allows each member to contribute fully to society.

The ideal of equal access is fundamental to uplifting marginalized groups in any society. While equality refers to how one is treated, and equity refers to what one is given, "fairness" remains the essence of both. Fair access has a different interpretation in a given society; however, we all have a role to play to ensure governments take action to make special provisions for previously disadvantaged groups, granting equal access and equal opportunity. Eliminating discrimination and removing the burdens it imposes creates an environment that promotes equality. Here, everyone is entitled to the same level of access and can avail themselves of the societal benefits granted to non-marginalized groups.

For a half-century, the Institute for Educational Leadership has championed the need for leaders at all levels to shake off their institutional constraints and work across boundaries to address the needs of young people and their families. I work within the Center for Workforce Development at IEL where my colleagues and I develop resources and build collaborations among stakeholders to ensure all youth, including disconnected youth - for example those in the juvenile justice system, foster care, or with disabilities - receive the support they need to become successfully-



employed adults. This includes initiatives that promote youth development and leadership, such as our national Youth Action Council on Transition.

Youth have played a critical role in shaping the disability rights movement going back to the 1970s with Ed Roberts at Berkeley. He was accepted into the university but because of his disability accommodation needs, the university could not house him with the other students. So he lived on a floor of a local hospital and eventually other college students with disabilities began moving in as well. They created social opportunities, organized together, and made their own decisions for their care. Their work led to what is now known as the Independent Living movement. The movement is a critical tenet of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other subsequent pieces of U.S. legislation, like the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Through YouthACT, youth and adults work as partners to improve local systems, such as transportation, education, and health care for all people. YouthACT leaders have created support and advocacy groups in their communities and universities, educated peers and adults, and improved services and programs for people with disabilities around the world.

As you can see, there are things you can do to lift up marginalized groups. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international rights treaty that provides a framework for creating legislation and policies around the world that embrace the rights and dignity of all people with disabilities. Constitutions or legislation can create special protections for marginalized groups, to ensure that all people in a country have access to equal opportunities. The youth-led independent living movement and the ADA were the model for CRPD.

If you see a problem of access, there are steps you can take to address it. You can start a petition, educate others on the importance of the issue, and meet with policymakers. You can have the difficult conversations around issues faced by people who are marginalized with others who want to help make a difference. You can talk with political leaders, organizations, and share personal stories of those who have been marginalized. Your story and your lived experience are as important to shaping policies, services, and programs as are the statistics delivered by researchers and political leaders.

Diverse people all over the world challenge human rights with their personal beliefs around culture, economics, and religion. This leads to the cultural isolation of groups, lack of access for others due to limited financial resources, and restrictions placed on groups as a result of religious practices. Our personal beliefs do not grant us permission to violate others' rights to practice their personal beliefs. The pursuit of human rights by one group may also lead to the violation of the human rights of another group. This is why it is so important to work together to abolish any laws, customs and practices that discriminate.

Practices and policies must be evaluated regularly. New practices and policies must be implemented. People in power must be held accountable for making decisions that represent everyone, especially those who have been marginalized.

We will examine more ways to guarantee equal access and practical ways that you can work to ensure the human rights of all in another lesson.

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